

# Bible Witness

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## CHURCH

A PEOPLE IN

## PRAYER

PART I





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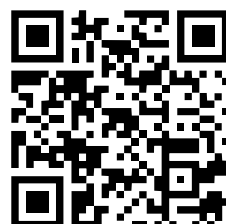
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## On the Cover ▲

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."—Philippians 4:6



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# CHURCH—A PEOPLE IN PRAYER (PART 1)

Volume 21 Issue 2 | March–April 2021

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PRAYER AS

# Waiting Upon God's Promise

ACTS 1:4,14



▲ "The Descent of the Holy Spirit" by Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641)  
Oil on canvas; on display at Schloss Sanssouci, Potsdam  
(Anthony van Dyck, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

Prayer is both communing and communicating with God. It involves acts of worship (such as praise, thanksgiving, confession about God's attributes and works), repentance, oath-taking, consecration of one's life, supplication, intercession, inquiring of God's will, seeking of God's guidance and blessing, etc. Undoubtedly, the attitudes expressed in prayers found in the Bible teach us about faith, submission and obedience to God's Word, dependence on His promises, love for God and His church, commitment to His work, preoccupation with God's glory, and more. Furthermore, the answers to prayers recorded in the Bible reveal precious truths about God's sovereignty, providence, wisdom, power, faithfulness, guidance, sufficiency, among others.

## "All Things Whatsoever" by Prayer

It goes without saying that the study of biblical prayers will provide lessons that permeate every aspect of our Christian life and ministry. It will also provide us with biblical perspectives on various facets of godliness. The Acts of the Apostles is one New Testament book from which we can glean much biblical counsel concerning the spiritual exercise of prayer. The Book of Acts mentions prayer to God about 50 times, thus making it the book with the second-most number of references to prayer in the New Testament, next to the Gospel of Luke. All of the prayers recorded in

Acts (both private, as well as public, prayers) are vital to the fulfilling of the book's major theme concerning believers being empowered by the Holy Ghost to be witnesses unto Christ "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (cf. 1:8). This indispensable factor of prayer can be seen in the following instances (among others):

- Believers waiting to receive the power (1:13-14);
- The appointing of a "replacement" apostle (1:24);
- The Jerusalem church being constituted and beginning its activities (2:42);
- Acknowledging God's sovereignty and remaining bold in the face of persecution (4:23-31);
- Strengthening of the soul at the time of martyrdom (7:59-60);
- The performance of the apostolic healing ministry (9:40);
- Precipitating the release of the imprisoned apostles (12:5, 16:25);
- The commissioning and sending of missionaries (13:3);
- The establishing of churches (14:23);
- Accompanying the bidding of momentous farewells (20:36; 21:5);
- God's servant being encouraged by like-minded brethren before undergoing great trial (28:14-15).

Undeniably, prayer is strategic in Acts—from start (1:14) to end (28:15)!

Without question, we can learn much from the prayers recorded in the Book of Acts, whose writer (Luke) chronicled how the Gospel of Christ was faithfully and effectively

witnessed by the believers through the power of the Holy Spirit from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke's record highlighted the key role played by the prayers of God's people in the advancement of the preaching of the Gospel, overcoming adversities and establishing churches. For the Gospel to spread, we must pray. For the deliverance of oppressed Christians, and for the conversion of the enemies of the Gospel and the church, we must pray. Indeed, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer (according to God's revealed will), believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22).

And "all things whatsoever" would certainly include the empowering of Christians to be witnesses of Christ in their current locale ("Jerusalem"), then to their neighbourhood ("Judaea"), and further to the next region ("Samaria") and distant lands ("unto the uttermost part of the earth") [cf. Acts 1:8]. This is manifestly demonstrated in the Book of Acts. The expansion of the church, through the preaching of God's Word, was unstoppable, resulting in great conversion of souls—right from day one, when "they that gladly received [the] word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto [the church] about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41)!

## Prayer Fuelled by God's Word

When we read through the Book of Acts, we may wonder what caused this whole "success story" of the church. It's not because the environment was

friendly. On the contrary, it was very hostile, where not only were the social, economic conditions confronting the church in those days unfavourable, but the apostles were also up against the religious and political forces of the day. They were not the elite of the society; neither were they the most educated and academically-trained in the land. Some were fishermen, and one was a former tax-collector. The only things they were armed with are the Gospel and prayer. Indeed, what they could do are these: preach and pray! And great was the impact, which was well-documented in the Book of Acts.

Indeed, when you have preachers preaching God's Word powerfully, God's Spirit quickly works to make the people prayerful, because they don't want to miss out on the blessings of the Word of God. This was evident in Acts 4:31—"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." Indeed, preaching yields prayer, and prayer yields more preaching with boldness. There won't be prayer unless the Word of God is preached! Otherwise, our prayers will only be for materialistic ends: "Lord, give me this, give me that." Beware of desecrating this particular means of grace by asking for nothing but carnal, material wants (which are characteristic of unregenerate hearts). Our prayer has to be that which God's Word commands, not what God's Word prohibits! Set your affection on things above (cf. Colossians 3:2). Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven (cf. Matthew 6:20). "Seek ye first the kingdom

of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Can Christians desire anything? No! We can only desire according to God's will, as revealed in His Word. The Word of God, stored in the heart, is "the fuel from which prayer receives life and warmth, ... the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong" (E.M. Bounds). To pray biblically, our imaginations, our desires have to be biblical. Only then, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, ... ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Just as what happened to the early church in Acts 4:31, "when they had prayed, the place was shaken..." Crucially, it is not about the place being shaken, but rather about hearts being woken out of their spiritual slumber and rebellion, and thereafter turn to God! That's the biggest miracle, and the church's ardent desire. And the result? The apostles became even bolder to preach Christ. Where preaching of God's Word flourishes, prayers also abound, without ceasing.

## Prayer Entails "Waiting" and "Continuing"

Assuredly, this powerful witness in Jerusalem, which would later spread throughout the regions, first began with Jesus telling the apostles to wait. "And, being assembled together with them, (he) commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me"

(Acts 1:4). So, prior to His ascension, Jesus told the disciples that they should not go anywhere, but wait, not even start preaching. Now, what does "wait" mean? The Greek word for "wait" is *perimenō*, which comes from the root verb (*menō*) meaning "to remain, wait, stay in a place". The word *perimenō* is a strengthened verb, which denotes that the apostles were to wait with an expectation, with a purpose, not waiting idly. They were to wait with great anticipation. And that was what the apostles did in obedience to Christ's instruction not to leave the city.

Upon returning to Jerusalem, "they went up into an upper room, where (they) abode" and "these all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:13, 14). Now, the Greek word (*proskartereō*) translated as "continued" has a similar sense as "wait". It means "to tarry, to endure steadfastly". It is a strong word that denotes the earnestness and intensity with which the apostles gave themselves to prayer. When Jesus said, "wait for the promise", He was saying that they were not to let anything else creep into and distract their mind. They were to wait in expectation of His promise, with faithfulness. Prayer is faithful waiting to serve God according to His precepts and promises. In other words, the disciples were to remember what Jesus had said about what He would do through them, when the Holy Spirit was come. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things



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## PRAYER IS FAITHFUL WAITING TO SERVE GOD ACCORDING TO HIS PRECEPTS AND PROMISES.

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to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). The “promise” Jesus was referring to is the Holy Spirit, that Comforter, whom the Father would send to guide them into all truth, to comfort them, to use them and so on (cf. John 16:13). Jesus wanted them to remember the things that He had said about the Holy Spirit, and wait in great anticipation. Dear brethren, prayer essentially requires that—prayers stem from waiting upon God’s Word, and continuing thereby.

### Prayer Engenders Unity in God’s Promise

It is noteworthy that as the apostles waited and continued, they did so “with one accord” (Acts 1:14a). There was unity of mind. What united them was not their physical need nor their fear. What united them were the promise and the commandment of Christ and His words. Indeed, if a prayer meeting is to be powerful and one of unity, it must be because of what we know concerning what Jesus has said and promised.

Another notable aspect of their prayer gathering is their engagement

in “prayer and supplication” (1:14b). The Greek word (*proseuchē*) translated as “prayer” here is a general word for prayer. This word can mean communing with God, bringing praises to God, offering prayers to God, even singing to the Lord. In fact, if you read the Book of Psalms (which constitute the “prayer book” of the Jews), you will notice many of the psalms are prayers composed as songs! What about “supplication”? That comes from the Greek word (*deēsis*) which means “a seeking, entreating of requests addressed by men to God”. It denotes an imploring of God’s aid in some particular practical or spiritual matter. In other words, in supplication, you make mention of specific needs and specific requests. Prayer and supplication go hand in hand. For example, in a church prayer meeting, we may pray, acknowledging who God is and extolling His greatness, His sovereignty, etc.—well, that’s prayer. But further to that, we may cry out, “Lord, we have a particular request based on Thy truth. By Thy Holy Spirit, empower us to be witnesses. Enable us to be ready to be Thy servants, to be bold witnesses for Thee”—now, that’s supplication. And that is one supplication which God is sure to answer! After all, that was how the thrilling story of the church’s pulsating witness for Christ first

began in Jerusalem, and then “in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”!

Finally, we note that this unity of mind and heart in the spiritual exercise of prayer extended to other fellow believers as well—“with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (1:14c). The prayer meeting was not confined only to the 11 disciples; there were other men and women involved. Indeed, true prayer activity makes believers as one submissive, humble

group of people. This is what we should be as a church. There is no personal glorification or stardom in Christianity. Each one has his place; some are leaders, some are assistants to leaders—but everybody together, humbly at the feet of Christ, praying. May God help us to emulate the early saints, who gathered in oneness of spirit with fellow believers, engaging in all prayers and supplication. That way, we may duly expect the promise of God being poured out on us, as we bear testimony in our bold witness for Christ in this world. Amen. ■



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# MEN OUGHT Always TO Pray ACTS 3:1–8



▲ "The Healing of the Lame Man" by Raphael (1483–1520)

Bodycolour on paper on canvas; on display at Victoria and Albert Museum, London  
(Image taken from <https://www.rct.uk/sites/default/files/collection-online/e/9/119028-1292704558.jpg>)

In Acts 3:1, we see Peter and John going up together into the temple, “at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour”. God would use these two apostles to bring about healing in a man who was lame. “And he (the lame man) leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them (Peter and John) into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3:8).

This miracle was wrought at the hour of prayer. A certain man, who was lame from his mother’s womb, was carried and laid at the gate of the temple on a daily basis (v. 2). He was there to ask alms. Asking of alms was a common thing among the poor people of the Jewish community. If they were blind, or lame (like this man was), they would normally sit outside the temple, where people often came to pray. Showing mercy to the poor and needy is something God has commanded both in the Old and New Testaments, so many worshippers would give alms to help these poor people to survive, including this lame man in question. But something else better happened to this man. For Peter said, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (v. 6). And then Peter “took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” (v. 7).

Amazingly, this man didn’t immediately run back home to tell the people, but he went into the temple together with Peter and John, to pray and praise God (cf. v. 8). The most important thing to him, upon restoration of his mobility, was to get into the temple to pray—not to

go away to engage in self-centred pursuits. Brethren, why does God heal us? Why does He save us and give us all spiritual and physical blessings? That we should pray.

## Prayer in the Leadership and Laity

Significantly, we can observe two categories of people mentioned here. Firstly, the apostles Peter and John (representing the leaders), who were observed to be going to pray. Peter was a man who would have a big role to play in the early leadership of the church. Before Paul appeared on the scene, Peter was the most celebrated among the early church leaders. John, another “pillar” of the church leadership (cf. Galatians 2:9), was seen on several occasions together with Peter in the Acts episodes. It seemed that both were the chief representatives of the apostles. This is corroborated in 8:14-15, “when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them (the Samaritan converts) Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost”.

These were two mighty leaders of the early church who were able to stay together and serve God because they were prayerful people. Truly, the leadership of our church must be a prayerful leadership. There is something really special about the leadership that pray. God will use



them mightily. But the converse is true—the leadership that cannot pray together is in great danger! Peter and John, though endowed with so much power of the Holy Spirit, performing stupendous miracles, went regularly to seek God in the temple. It goes without saying why they went to the temple at the ninth hour. Was it to perform some miracle? No, but to pray! For it was the hour of prayer in the temple. They went there like any other worshipper—to pray! That, we believe, is the secret of their mighty ministry together as church leaders.

Secondly, the prayerful inclination of the healed lame man (representing the lay people) is also worthy of more than a passing mention. Because of Peter and John, he was also led to enter the temple to pray. A praying leadership will give rise to praying congregations. This is alluded to in Acts 1:14, where we see not only the eleven disciples, but also others (including “the women”) being mentioned as praying with them. This is significant in the ministry of the church. While it is a pastor’s duty to pray as an expression of his faith (in obedience to God who commands that we should pray), at the same time, it is also his duty to call people to pray for him.

Take a leaf from the apostle Paul’s desire for the lay people to join him in prayer. When Paul wrote to the Romans, he said in Romans 15:30, “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”. Paul asked the people in the church to exert themselves in the

spiritual exercise of prayer on behalf of him. He was unashamed about this matter of asking others to pray with him and for him. In Ephesians 6:19, we read that he had asked the Ephesian church to pray “for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel”. Without question, for the church ministry to flourish, both the leadership and laity must strive together in prayer, so that, among other things, “the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified” (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

## Prayer for Strengthening of Ministry

Belief in Christ and prayer are two sides of the same coin. Every believing heart is supernaturally, spiritually endowed with the desire for prayer. There is not a believing heart that doesn’t pray. The greater the faith of a man, the greater his prayer habits. Dear church, we must not fail to pray if our ministries (both local and overseas) are to flourish. It is good to remember that Peter and John, who were going up to the temple to pray together, were working together for the spreading of the Gospel. When you pray together, you work well. Whether you are serving in a committee, or going for evangelism, or engaging in visitation of the elderly or needy brethren in church, it is vital to pray first. Otherwise, you may quarrel along the way, or your visitation may end up in disarray. Likewise, if you are singing together in a choir, or if you

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## WITHOUT QUESTION, FOR THE CHURCH MINISTRY TO FLOURISH, BOTH THE LEADERSHIP AND LAITY MUST STRIVE TOGETHER IN PRAYER.

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are working together in the PA team, or the internet media ministry, or the ushers’ ministry, or the refreshments team (which also oversee the Holy Communion preparations), etc., always pray first—and pray together frequently.

The attitude of prayer ought to be one of humility, and acknowledgment of weakness prevailing in us. It is not a time to show off our power. Each time we come together as a church, even if it’s a small group of brethren, it is most necessary and fitting to pray to the Lord. It is not without reason that the Old Testament temple (and, as a corollary, the church) is called “an house of prayer” (cf. Isaiah 56:7).

## Prayer Requires Regular Appointed Times

If the church is to be a house of prayer, then there must be appointed seasons of prayer in the church. Notice that Peter and John went up to the temple regularly for prayer. There was a set time for prayer, which, according to Acts 3:1, was the ninth hour (i.e. 3

o’clock in the afternoon). The ninth hour was one of the set times for Jewish prayers. According to the Old Testament, there were morning sacrifices, and evening sacrifices in the temple (cf. Exodus 29:38-42), so the believing Jews all went to the temple to pray at those set times, as it was customary.

There is thus biblical precedent for the church to set aside a regular appointed time for corporate prayer. Hence, the weekly church prayer meeting, which is, in many ways, the “powerhouse” of the church. Sadly, there are people who don’t believe in the importance of prayer meeting. Worse still, there are people in churches today who don’t see the need for daily prayer, as individuals and as a family. They say there’s no evidence in the Bible for such daily devotion.

Do they not know from Scripture how Job prayed for his children every day, even with sacrifices, in case they had sinned and thereby needed sanctification (cf. Job 1:5)? Have they conveniently forgotten the biblical instruction in Deuteronomy 6:7, where God says that a father should speak about God’s Word with his children while he sits, walks,

lies down, and moves about with them? Have they not read the Book of Proverbs (especially chapters 1 to 8), wherein is impressed upon us how a father and mother should instruct the children in the Word of God? The biblical teaching is that such times for devotion and prayer are not just on a regular basis, but as often as possible! The same applies to the larger family of God, the church.

Truly, when a church makes full use of those provisions under God's

providence to pray (at set times and set places), there'll be provisions of God's blessings. While none of us today is an apostle and so won't be able to heal people miraculously, we will be used by God to restore many to the joy of salvation, and to spiritual health. That, spiritually speaking, is the biggest miracle! Just like that healed lame man, who "entered ... into the temple, ... **praising God**"! That being the case, may we, as a church, pray always (Luke 18:1) and without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Amen. ■

# Prayer Amid Persecution

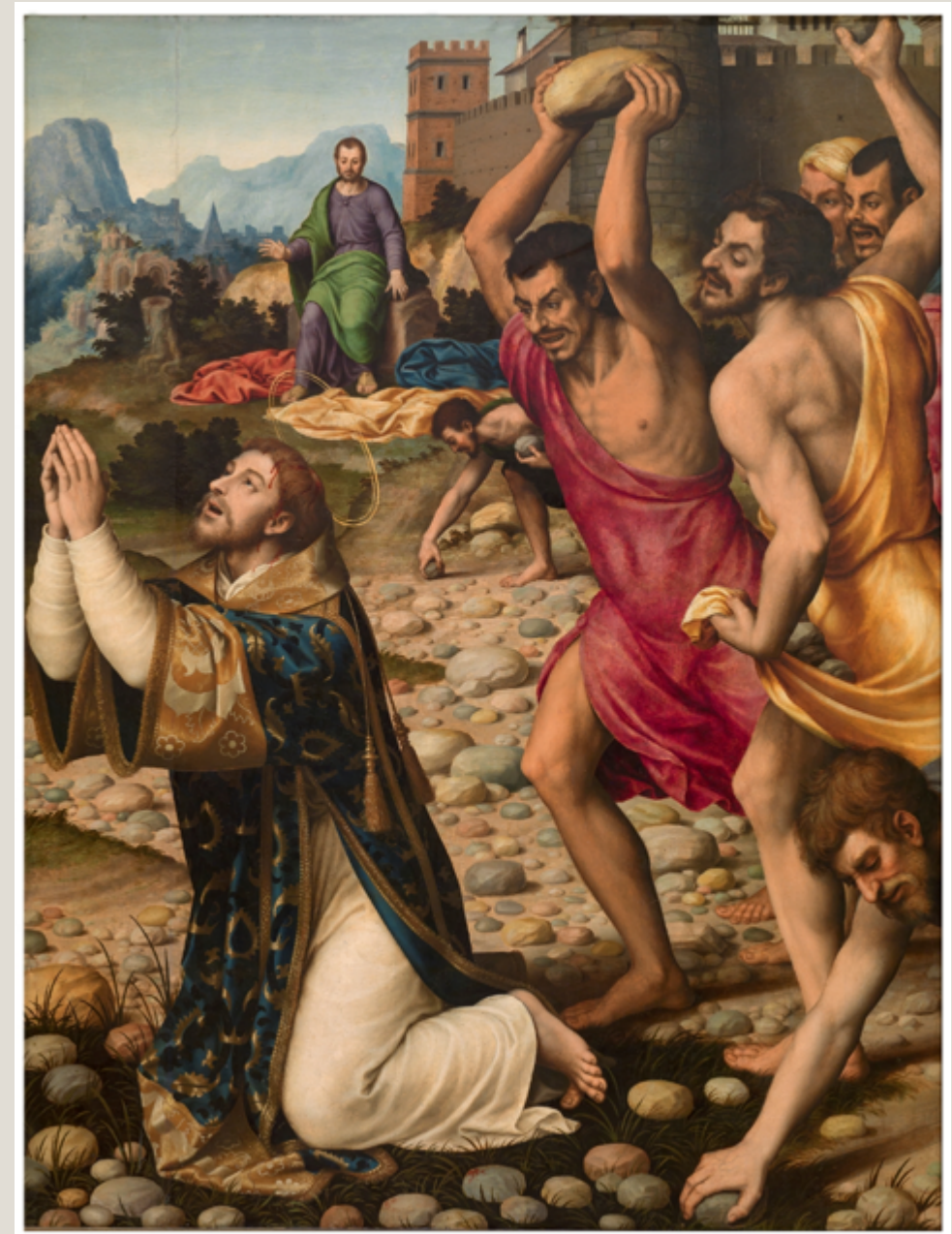
Acts 4:1–3, 23–31

In Acts 2:42, we read that the believers in the early church "continued stedfastly ... in prayers", among other spiritual activities. The Greek word (*proseuchē*) for "prayers" is a general word which refers to all kinds of prayers—long prayers, short prayers, prayers for oneself, intercession for others, thanksgiving prayers, petitions, supplications, and so on. So, these early believers, having great unity of heart in Christ, enjoyed their time together, "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, ... eat[ing] their meat with gladness

and singleness of heart, praising God (*that's another word denoting prayer*), and having favour with all the people" (2:46-47a).

## Marvel Not If the World Hate You

Note that the gathering of the early church was a daily experience—sometimes they met in the temple, sometimes in believers' houses. Apparently, the early church had unhindered access to the temple,



▲ "The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen" by Juan de Juanes (1507–1579)

Oil on panel; on display at Museo del Prado, Madrid

(Image taken from <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-martyrdom-of-saint-stephen/637be782-674b-47db-bd73-1789aecdd2d4>)

where they went in daily and worshipped. The Jewish leadership had not stamped out Christian meetings from the temple grounds yet. However, when the church steadily increased, as "the Lord

added to the church daily such as should be saved" (2:47b), we see a change of mood in the Jewish authorities. "As they (the apostles) spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the



Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:1-2). We see here a belligerent scenario of the Jewish leadership acting against the apostles. Persecution quickly arose in opposition to the irresistible Christian witness.

Now, it should be noted that though the church had hitherto met together to pray daily, they were now getting into a new “realm” of prayer—i.e. prayer to confront persecution. God’s church needs to understand this: prayer is not about seeking to be richer and well-placed in society. When we are pushed back as a church by powerful figures and authorities of the land, we must know how to “absorb” the persecution and still expect great progress. Persecution might stress us out or even silence some Christians, but it does not necessarily have to result in the curtailing of the church’s activities. Persecution may well be an opportunity for Christians to realise the power of prayer!

Dear brethren, the early church did not cringe under threat. True believers, even though they were healed miraculously through the apostles’ prayer, never desired healing per se because they loved comfort and pleasure on earth. In fact, they were ready to suffer more. Likewise, we must be willing, because of our faith in Christ, to be persecuted and die (cf. Matthew 16:25). Death is not an issue. We don’t become a Christian to escape death. Whether it is sickness or persecution that brings about death, true faith in Christ prepares us for the worst experience on this earth, so that

we are ready to leave this world and enter the eternal existence.

The apostles would have remembered Jesus’ words in John 15:18—“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” If the world is provoked by the holy demands of God’s Word, it would also detest those who advocate God’s Word. The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees were one such hostile group of people. By arresting the apostles and putting them in prison (cf. 4:3), they were desperate to silence the preaching of God’s Word. Dear brethren, true preaching of the Gospel will provoke the enemies of Christ. Preaching will cause offence to the unbelieving people, even provoking them to hostility, hatred and violence. However, persecution cannot stop God’s purpose concerning salvation of the people. That’s what we read in Acts 4:4—“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men (*not including women*) was about five thousand”!

Nevertheless, one spiritual reality that we cannot deny is this: God’s power does not eliminate persecution. God’s power includes persecution in the preaching ministry, but with the accompanying spiritual strength of heart to overcome it. Learn from Peter and John’s bold, uncompromising response when the Jewish authorities threatened them, and “commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (4:18b). “But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but

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## GOD’S POWER DOES NOT ELIMINATE PERSECUTION.

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speak the things which we have seen and heard” (4:19-20). Despite being “further threatened” (4:21a) and under severe intimidation, the apostles refused to compromise. This was a far cry from modern Christianity, which seeks to eradicate persecution by forming ecumenical alliances and forging political agreements. The early church, however, had no such ideas—they had another means to overcome persecution, i.e. prayer.

### Prayerful Response to Persecution

Prayer is the way through persecution. Prayer is God’s appointed means of overcoming all the powerful forces that work against the kingdom of God. Let’s learn how the apostles responded in the face of persecution. “And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them” (4:23). These preachers went back to the believing people, and reported all the threats issued by the religious authorities. As soon as the believers heard of the report of persecution, “they lifted up their voice to God with one accord” (4:24a) in corporate prayer. The church members were united (ironically) by persecution. They did not scatter; their first

reaction was not to run and flee. Instead, they were united in prayer.

It’s very noteworthy what they prayed—“Lord, thou art God ...” (4:24b). The Greek word for “Lord” here is *Despota* (which means “one who possesses supreme authority”), from which we get the English word “despot”. Jesus is referred to as the “Despot”, meaning to say that He is the great and mighty God, who cannot be challenged, as He is also the Creator of “heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is” (4:24c). In their prayer, they quoted Psalm 2 and said, “Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?” (4:25b). They were, in effect, rhetorically declaring that God, who is in control of all things, has already predicted their persecution as fulfilling God’s Word in Psalm 2. As such, no amount of violent opposition can put a stop to God’s kingdom (cf. Psalm 2:4-6)!

Dear brethren, God did not promise a life without persecution for the church. Wherever the church will be established, and whenever it does God’s will, it must expect the heathen to rage, and the earthly kings to stand against Christ and His followers. Yes, we do feel the fear when threatened, when violently treated. But what gives us strength is our time with God in prayer. The church must learn to pray

aright. There is no point just praying, “Lord, stop the persecution.” The biblical church needs to embrace this reality: “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Indeed, Jesus Himself has exhorted, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

## Prayer Overcomes Fear

With such Scriptural insights and spiritual understanding, the early saints were basically acknowledging that the persecution of the church is already decreed by God as a means to accomplish His glorious, eternal purposes. Knowing such biblical truth would make them free from bondage (cf. John 8:32). It liberated them from undue fear, and all that might cause them to be entangled by the love for this world. That’s what prayer is all about.

Prayer is the time you acknowledge the sovereignty of God and His will.

The prayer of the church must be: “Just as Jesus our Saviour was allowed by God the Father to be persecuted, so His church will also be persecuted. But amid the persecution, may we be like our Saviour, and be His faithful servants.” Our prayer should be for unwavering faith, for boldness to preach the Gospel in an uncompromising fashion. That was what the early church prayed for: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” (4:29).

It is instructive to see how God answered that prayer. “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (4:31). God poured out His Holy Spirit and gave them the strength of heart. Truly, persecution will not stop the power of the Gospel. With prayer, when the church and its preachers would stand up to face a hostile world and declare Christ, great things would happen. The church became “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15b), marked by oneness and harmony, a spirit of sharing, power in witnessing, and great favour from God (cf. 4:32-33). What a blessed picture of how Christ

would strengthen His church on earth, such that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18b)!

## Conclusion

Dear brethren, God-decreed persecution of the church can only be overcome by prayer. Indeed, prayer is not to ask for more money, more wealth, more promotion, more comfort, more pleasure, more peace with the world. No, that’s not why God has ordained prayer as a means of grace. God ordained prayer for His people to unite with Christ and find the spiritual strength to say “no” to the ungodly world, to say “no” to the enemies of the Gospel, and be supplied

with moral and inner courage to suffer and bear testimony for Christ. As we do so, we can be overcomers amid our persecutions, and remain bold and clear in our preaching, so that those who hear us, even our enemies, may hear of the salvation grace of Jesus Christ. May the Lord’s messengers—missionaries, preachers and pastors—not be intimidated, though they may be threatened and violated because of the opposition, but be granted boldness, courage and strength to preach the Gospel. Our heartfelt prayer should be: “That God’s way may be known upon earth, and His saving health among all nations, so that people from all corners of the earth may come and worship God” (cf. Psalm 67:2-3). Prayer is the means to achieve it. ■



**IN HIS STEPS**  
1 PETER 2:21-25

Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church  
**ONLINE MISSIONARY CONFERENCE 2021**  
(VIA ZOOM)

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Speakers: Rev. Paul Cheng; Pastor Koshy and Preachers of GBPC  
Dates: 7th–11th June 2021 (Monday to Friday)  
Programme:  
Mon, 7pm–9.30pm  
Tues–Thurs, 2pm–9.30pm  
Fri, 2pm–5.30pm



# Paramount Priority IN Church Ministry

ACTS 6:1–6

**T**he young church at Jerusalem was blessed with extraordinary preaching of the apostles that resulted in a fast-growing church (Acts 6:1a). Though it was met with persecution and opposition, the church was in prayer. Their prayer, offered on behalf of the apostles, was deeply rooted in the Word of God. By quoting Psalm 2 (cf. Acts 4:25–26), they acknowledged that persecution was something that the church must expect not to escape from. Christian ministry is a battle. So, they prayed that the Lord would enable the apostles to preach with boldness, and not give in to any fear. And that's what we have learned—that prayer was the means by which persecution was overcome.

## Church Undermined by Potential Discord

However, a peculiar situation started to fester within the church. The devil had a new tactic. While persecution from without couldn't shake the strong faith of the believers, a seeming lack of coordination in an administrative matter within the church threatened to undermine

the church. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (v. 1). Within the church, the Grecian widows were apparently not cared for as much as their Hebrew counterparts. The devil took advantage of the situation by attempting to sow discord and make it a big issue. But the Lord again granted the church the wisdom of prayer. How prayer is so important even in overcoming internal problems that might brew within the church from time to time!

Now, the Grecians were Greek-speaking Jews in diaspora who had become natives of different parts of the Roman empire. These were Jews who had accepted the Greek way of life—their culture, language, way of eating, way of dressing, and so on. Apparently, a number of them returned to Jerusalem and lived as a community—Hellenistic Jews (known also as Grecians). The Hebrews were mostly natives of Palestine; not surprisingly, historically, there was tension throughout the Jewish world between the Hebrews and the Grecians. In this particular context, the Grecian widows were somehow sidelined. It

was unfortunate that there appeared to have been some cultural division within the church. That the Grecian widows were unknowingly ignored (cf. 1 Timothy 5:3–8) in the provision of the necessities of life is a serious one created by the explosive growth in "the number of the disciples" (v. 1a).

It must have been increasingly difficult for the apostles to oversee the equitable distribution of food and necessities to the needy brethren within the fast-growing church. Hitherto, the apostles were supervising all the work, which simply became too massive a job (given the sheer numbers) for them to handle by themselves. When one particular group (the Grecian widows) were not cared for, that caused a murmuring within the church which, if left unaddressed, could "snowball" into potentially divisive dissatisfaction. In such times, people can accuse one another. Ironically, persecution and intimidation from the outside world could not destroy the church's strong stand for the Lord, but tension from disharmony among the church members could seriously undermine their witness.

## Solution Sought through Prayerful Deliberation

The initial complaint of the people seemed justified, though the neglect was not deliberate. Having noted the unwitting discrepancy, "the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason

that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (vv. 2–4). It is instructive that the apostles did not jump straight into the fray and offer to handle it themselves. In giving a most biblical solution to the church, they were unanimous, and were all in agreement that their specific calling as apostles was to preach the Word of God, to pray to God in worship of Him, and to intercede for the church. As such, they thought it unwise to get too involved with all these administrative problems that they became distracted from their laborious ministry of handling the Word of God with prayer.

Caring for the widows (and, by extension, charity work), though important, is not priority number one. Rather, the apostles (clearly moved by the Holy Spirit) put things in perspective: prayer and the preaching of God's Word must be the number one ministry of the church. But God is gracious to provide gifted men in the church who should take care of this very needful, important matter of caring for the needy, believing widows in their midst. In their prayerful consideration, the solution they put forth was to find honest, Spirit-filled men endued with godly wisdom—who were not driven by carnal passions of fleshly lust, pride, human intellect or feelings—to be entrusted with the stewardship of the daily ministration to the believing widows (cf. v. 3). The biblical implication is clear: if pastors and preachers whom God appoints

are to really pay attention to preaching and prayer, there must be outstanding people of honesty, fullness of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom to manage the administrative matters of the church. That's why we must pray for godly elders who can rule the church well, and for spiritually qualified deacons who can assist them.

The priority in church ministry is also clear: charity work must come under the preaching of God's Word and prayer. A lot of churches have lost their understanding of what ministry is. By busily setting up hospitals, schools, orphanages and so on, and in the process diminishing the preaching of the Word, or hindering the application of the principles of the Word, the church becomes more like a social enterprise. When the biblical priority is lacking, the church will suffer.

## Spiritual Logic in Putting Prayer Before Service

Note the way the apostles emphasised their Spirit-inspired perspective: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (v. 2b). In other words, there is no logic, no purpose whatsoever for God's appointed ministers (commissioned

to labour in the word and doctrine) and leadership (entrusted with the spiritual care of the church), to put aside preaching and prayer, just so to take care of the mundane matters of the church. That will be misplaced priority within the church! The apostles' priorities were not only rightly discerned, their commitment

to the priorities was non-negotiable. They were determined to put first things first, by continually devoting themselves to the service of utmost importance—prayer and the ministry of the Word (cf. v. 4).

The apostles were essentially saying to the church, "Brethren, you take care of these

details of the needs of the widows by appointing the right people. But we should never diminish, nor forsake, nor neglect prayer and the preaching of God's Word." By putting first things first, i.e. prayer and preaching, the whole church will strengthen the hand of God's appointed servants in their spiritual oversight of God's flock and the church will function with God's blessings upon it. At the advice of the apostles, the church brought together seven men (whose names are mentioned in v. 5), who were "set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (v. 6). Straightaway, we see how prayer is integral to the church ministry. The apostles needed to pray for and pray over those men whom

God would give to the church to support the work. Though the content of their prayer was not recorded, we can perceive a couple of things involved in their praying.

Firstly, they "laid their hands on them". The phrase "laid hands on" would denote the act of appointing these men with recognition of their divinely instilled spiritual qualities. It is God who prepared these people, and God's Holy Spirit is the One who filled them and gave them the necessary gifts to serve. So, the apostles' praying (accompanied with laying of hands), manifests their recognition of and thanksgiving for these God-sent people. Secondly, as they gave thanks, they also acknowledged God as providing and caring for, and directing the church. Because they had specifically prayed for seven men with specific moral and spiritual qualifications (whom they had asked the congregation to go and look for, and whom God did show them), their prayer affirmed God as sovereign over the affairs of the church. As a caring Saviour and the Head of the church, God is not a disinterested party detached from our life and ministry. Thus, their prayer manifests their acknowledgment and affirmation of God's presence, control, as well as provision for the church.

And when the answers came on time, and the Lord blessed the work,



▲ "St Stephen Distributing Alms" by Fra Angelico (1395–1455)  
Fresco on the walls of Niccoline Chapel in Vatican City.  
(Fra Angelico, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

what an affirmation of God's stamp on the ministry of the church! Seven competent and spiritually qualified men were chosen to manage the administration of all practical things, including being placed in charge of the distribution of necessities to the Grecian widows, as well as to all who were needy. Only through prayer can we go through all those tensions and struggles that we (especially the leaders) face in decision-making scenarios, where the repercussions are momentous and far-reaching. It would not surprise us that the apostles might have heaved a sigh of relief, and uttered a wonderful prayer on



behalf of the Grecian widows: “Thank you, Lord, for making this problem known to us. May Thou comfort and give peace to our hitherto neglected sisters. Let them know that God has heard their cry and provided men who are going to take care of the Hebrew, as well as the Grecian widows!”

## Conclusion

May God help us to have such blessings of prayer. Not only will we overcome persecution from without, we will also prevail over potentially divisive issues (that can arise from steady church growth) from within. The solution to these is not clever manoeuvring of astute minds, but humble “kneeling” of prayerful hearts.

We have learned how the Lord guided the apostles in resolving problems that sprang up within the church, due to lack of care extended to the Grecian widows. Clear Scriptural guidance was adhered to by refocusing on the paramount tasks of the church. Once the church activities were reorganised to enhance and centre around prayer and preaching of God’s Word, the rest would take care of themselves. If we seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, the Lord will take care of all the nitty gritty details of mundane administrative matters of the church (cf. Matthew 6:33). Prayer is priority number one, together with the preaching of God’s Word. May the church never cease to pray and preach! ■

# Gospel-Oriented Prayer

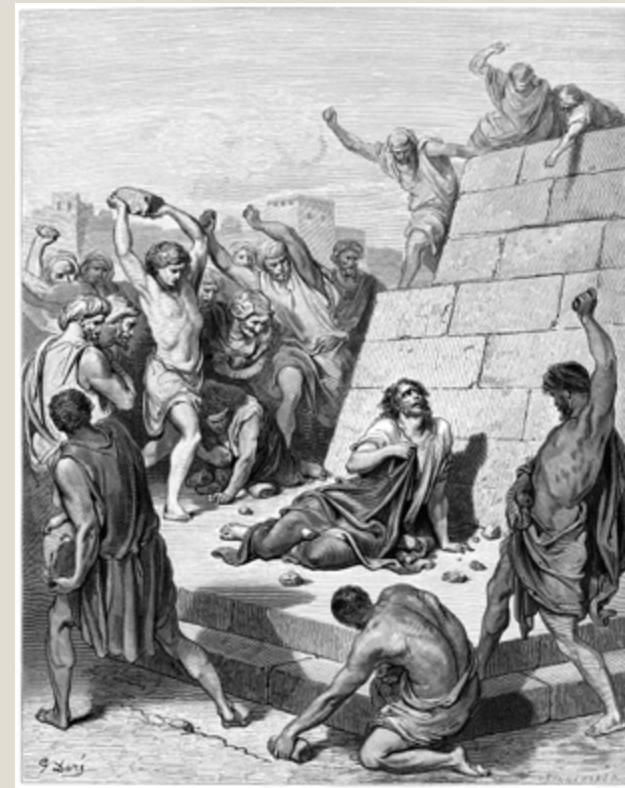
ACTS 7:55–60

**P**rayer must take centre stage, together with the Word of God, in the ministry of the church. That’s what we see in the case of Stephen—one of the seven (cf. Acts 6:3, 5)—who became a powerful witness of Christ in preaching God’s Word. Let’s pay attention to his prayer at the end of his life, as recorded for us in Acts 7:59–60. “... Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he knelt down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said

this, he fell asleep.” What confronts us here is a powerful witness of Christ, facing his last moments on earth with a victorious attitude of prayer!

## Prayerful Disposition amid Hostile Reaction

In the major part of Acts 7 (vv. 2–53), we have the record of Stephen’s message,



▲ “Martyrdom of Saint Stephen” by Gustave Doré (1832–1883), Public domain.

where he defended the Gospel of Jesus Christ against the Jewish leaders, who vehemently opposed the preaching of Jesus as the prophesied Messiah. Though interrogated by them, he was so calm and collected in his mind that he put up a very clear presentation of the Gospel. Having reasoned that Jesus is the fulfilment of the voices of the Old Testament prophets, “the Just One; of whom ye (the Jewish leaders) have been now the betrayers and murderers” (v. 52b), their belligerent response set the stage for Stephen’s last prayer. “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth” (v. 54). The preaching of God’s Word can cut through the hearts of impenitent, unrepentant sinners. Yet,

even when all these people were coming against him with intense wrath and murderous intent, there would be no lack of the presence, empowerment and comfort of his loving Saviour in heaven.

Stephen, though alone then in the midst of a group of vile, vicious men, was not alone without God’s presence. All the Christian brethren might be far away from him, but “he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven” (v. 55a), and realised Someone was always with him. It was more than a mere physical looking up; it was a spiritual search for Christ his Saviour—for companionship, courage, and presence of mind to

fulfil his calling at that moment. He looked to heaven because the Lord who dwelleth in heaven is all-powerful, and will hear the prayers of His servants. And behold, the Lord was pleased to let him have a glimpse of “the glory of God” (v. 55b), which was definitely an assuring sight to him!

## The Righteous Cry, and the LORD Heareth

Interestingly, he saw “Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (v. 55c). Now, from the Book of Hebrews, we know that Jesus, our merciful and

faithful High Priest, “after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12). He has sat down, as His had been a complete and perfect sacrifice—no more sacrifices needed to be offered. However, we see here Jesus as standing. Why? The clue lies in Revelation 1, where Jesus was seen standing and moving about in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks (1:13), which signify the seven churches (1:20). As Head of the seven churches, He was inspecting and supervising each of the seven candlesticks. Jesus’ posture of “standing” means He was keenly interested in what was happening to His servant, as though the whole heaven was then focused upon this poor soul about to be martyred!

Dear church, God “who humbleth himself to behold the things that are ... in the earth” (Psalm 113:6), takes a keen interest in all the affairs of the church. This is why we must pray—we don’t pray to a God who is disinterested. We tell our needs to a God who is ever caring for us (cf. 1 Peter 5:7), a Saviour who is ever attending to our cry (cf. Psalm 34:15). Dear brethren, though you may be totally rejected by the world, and thus find yourself lonely (without being given any further

opportunity to talk to those who had cared for and prayed with you), do realise that you won’t be left alone without heaven. Heaven is always near you. Wonderful is that prayer which Jesus has taught us to pray—“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9-10). Heaven is attending to the kingdom of God, and you are part of it. Christ, as King of His kingdom, is never far away. He “stands”, as it were, to care for you. Truly, “The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry” (Psalm 34:15).

## **The Righteous Cry, Even for Sinners to Hear**

Now, Stephen’s declarative prayer in v. 56 is an affirmation of who Christ is. He wanted not only to express clearly what God was teaching him in that moment, he also wanted those enemies of God to hear his prayer. There is nothing unscriptural about public prayers of genuine humility and conviction of faith like that of Stephen’s public cry. This last prayer

of Stephen was not a silent prayer before God; it was a public prayer, affirming first of all that Jesus alone is the glorious Saviour, who has ascended to heaven. He wanted these bigoted Jewish leaders to know that the same Jesus whom they had killed is a resurrected Saviour, who now liveth on the right hand of the Father, ever stooping down to hear the prayers of His saints. Notwithstanding their spiritual blindness, Stephen cried out, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (v. 56)! Though those unbelieving Jewish leaders’ eyes were not opened, being blind and deaf to the Gospel, Stephen still shouted out the truth. A saint’s prayer is, first of all, for God’s own glory, and then for the believing hearts, as well as for hearts that will be opened by God to hear it.

With Scriptural hindsight, Stephen’s prayer and the things that would immediately follow were (as it were, divinely) targeted for a particular soul in that group of enemies—“a young [man] ... whose name was Saul” (v. 58b). A Gospel-based prayer is as good as preaching of the Gospel. Preaching of the Word and prayer are like the two wings of a bird: you can’t separate them. Stephen’s prayer was for God to hear, and also to bring God’s purposes unto the ears of a man named Saul, who would go on to become a great preacher of the Gospel, and a selfless under-shepherd of the church.

At the moment when they stoned him, we find Stephen “calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (v. 59) What a prayer! He exalted Jesus as God. Not only does

our Mediator (who stands between God and men, to reconcile and bring us to God) hear our prayers, He also receives them. And here Stephen testified of the greatness of Christ, the only One who can save souls and take them to heaven. This prayer declares the Gospel truth—that Jesus is the way to heaven! No one can have the hope of heaven after death without Christ. In this prayer, there is a significant trace of Gospel preaching—surely meant for sinners to hear, if they would!

## **Precious in God’s Sight is His Saints’ Death**

Stephen could have prayed, “Do a miracle, O Lord! Stop the stones of these enemies falling upon me!” Instead, he was able to sense God’s purpose for his life culminating in his martyrdom. When a saint of God is about to die, knowing he has to put his life down for Christ’s sake, he will not want to live. It is better to die for Christ than to live. A praying Christian will never be snatched away from the purposes of God; prayer always prepares a man to accomplish God’s purposes in his life—and death! Even if he dies in his prime for the Gospel’s sake, he can die on a glorious, victorious note. It would not be a sad or vain death.

Stephen, even though he would not have any opportunity to preach one more sermon, nor to have one more occasion of fellowship with the brethren, was not fretful about his impending death. He knelt down in

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**PRAYER ALWAYS PREPARES A MAN TO  
ACCOMPLISH GOD’S PURPOSES IN HIS  
LIFE—AND DEATH!**

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surrender to God; prayer is a time when you surrender fully to God's purposes. And there was one more thing he still desired while he still had breath. He was not troubled by the prospect of death, but his aching heart was stirred by the prospect of these enemies dying in their sins. So, he went down on his knees, "and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (v. 60a)! When he had said this, "he fell asleep (i.e. he died)" (v. 60b). It is comforting to know that a believer's death is described as "sleep"—which means it's only for a season. His body shall rise again when Christ returns. In the meantime, Stephen, being "absent from the body", his soul is "present with the Lord" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:8).

Dear brethren, for the Gospel's sake, a true disciple must be prepared to give up everything, even his life. Yet, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). In the face of death, Stephen's prayer became a tool of the Gospel. May we give more than just passing attention to that short but profound prayer uttered by Stephen. Let not just the content, but also the intent of Stephen's prayer resonate in our hearts as we bear witness to the Gospel truth, even in severely trying times. For such Gospel-oriented prayer will go a long way towards making the church on earth a powerful, fruit-bearing witness for Christ. Amen. ■

## BIBLE TRIVIA—NUMBERS 21:10–35

SARAH YONG

The path below traces the continuing journey of the Israelites through the wilderness. Read the verses indicated, and then fill in each incomplete word with a suitable answer taken from the verse(s), to see how the LORD led His people to possess the land of the enemy.

### Answers to Bible Trivia—Numbers 21:1–9 (Vol. 21, Iss. 1, p. 25)

- 1) prisoners, 2) deliver, 3) Hormah, 4) discouraged, 5) wilderness, 6) serpents, 7) spoken, 8) looketh, 9) lived; keyword: salvation

2) They journeyed through the land of Moab till they reached the c \_\_\_\_\_ of the Amorites (v. 13).

3) They then came to the w \_\_\_\_\_ whereof the LORD spake unto Moses to gather the people (v. 16).

4) While at the top of mount P \_\_\_\_\_, Israel sent messengers to request passage through the land of the Amorites (vv. 20-21).

8) Subsequently, when Og, the king of Bashan, and his people fought against the Israelites, God d \_\_\_\_\_ them into Moses' hand (v. 34).

7) After spying out Jaazer, the Israelites captured the v \_\_\_\_\_ thereof, and drove out the enemy (v. 32).

5) Sihon, king of the Amorites, did not allow Israel to pass through his b \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 23).

6) When attacked, Israel killed him with the edge of the sword and took all the c \_\_\_\_\_ of the Amorites (vv.24–25).

1) The children of Israel moved on and p \_\_\_\_\_ in Oboth (v. 10).

START HERE!

# HUDSON TAYLOR (1832-1905) PART VI

Retold by Jenny Lok  
Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

Retold from:

- "To China With Love" by Hudson Taylor, published by Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor—God's Man in China" by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, published by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor and Maria, Pioneers in China" by J. C. Pollock, published by Kingsway Publications Ltd, the United Kingdom
- "God's Adventurer" by Phyllis Thompson, published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship (IHQ) Ltd, Singapore

As the ship gathered speed and moved further and further from the shore, Hudson could barely see his mother, for all that remained was a tiny speck in the distance. No sooner had the Dumfries left the River Mersey for the Irish Channel than it met with a gale. For 12 days, the little ship was beaten back and forth by the violent wind, and was unable to progress in its journey. The sea turned foamy, and huge waves rolled over the tiny Dumfries, threatening to submerge it. Seawater started to seep into the cabins, and soon Hudson's clothes became wet and stuck to him like glue. He felt so helpless and wondered, "Will the mountainous waves dash the ship and all on board to pieces?"

The captain came over, his face looking grim and worried. "Look at the sea! It's raging. Unless God helps us, there is really no hope!" he said, trying to keep his voice calm.

"Are we approaching the Welsh coast—the dangerous Welsh coast with its rocks jutting out into the sea?" asked Hudson, slightly disturbed.

"15 or 16 miles ... we must carry more sail. The more sail we carry, the less we shall drift. God grant the mast can stand it..." the captain replied.

Almost immediately, the captain gave instructions for 2 sails to be hoisted.

"Well, Hudson. We have done everything that can be done. Now, we can only await the result."

"No, there is one thing we have not done yet," replied Hudson.

Looking puzzled, the captain asked, "What is it?"

"Remember, there are four of us on board who are Christians (the Swedish carpenter, a steward, the captain and Hudson himself). Let us each retire to our own cabin and pray to the Lord to give us an immediate breeze. I believe He can send it any time, even now!" Everyone agreed to do so without delay. Hudson went back to his cabin, and spent some time reading the Bible and praying. The Word of God in John 14:1 brought so much comfort and peace to his anxious soul: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." After a brief time of earnest prayer, Hudson knew deep in his heart that God would surely hear their prayers.

Feeling joyful for the quiet confidence that God had given him, Hudson went on deck and looked for the first officer-in-charge, who was not a believer.

"Sir, please could you let down the corner of the main sail?"

"What would be the good of that?" he queried.

"You see, we have asked a wind from God. It should be coming soon. There's no time to lose as we are so near the rocks!"





The godless man stared at Hudson in disbelief and said mockingly, "I would sooner see a wind than hear of it!" Before he could continue further, the corner of the sail started to flutter in the slight breeze that was slowly coming.

"Don't you see that the wind is coming? Look at the sail!" Hudson cried out in delight.

"No, it's just a very small breeze, a mere puff of wind," he retorted.

"Quick, let down the main sail. You'll see the benefit soon!"

This time, the first officer obeyed without hesitation. By this time, the captain had heard the commotion, and he came running from his cabin onto the deck.

"Yes, the breeze is here. Thank God," he sighed with relief.

However, the danger was not over yet. The rocks were just ahead of them. Could the ship steer clear of the rocks without being hit and made to sink in the deep sea? Hudson held his breath as they approached the rocks. Suddenly, the wind changed its direction in their favour; with that, the ship escaped the jagged rocks, missing them by a mere handbreadth! The ship was finally out in the open sea, safe and sound.

The Dumfries continued on its journey without further mishap. Everyone, especially Hudson, could not wait to sit back and enjoy the peace and quietness after enduring (for a prolonged period) the deafening roar of the angry waves in the deep, wide sea.

On 1 March 1854, five and a half months later, Hudson finally arrived in Shanghai. How wonderful it was to feel the ground beneath his feet once again! At last, he was able to set foot on Chinese soil!

"Thank you, Lord, for such a day as this!" Hudson exclaimed as tears of joy and gratitude streamed down his face.

With quick light steps, Hudson hastened onshore in no time. Suddenly, it dawned on him that he was alone! There was no one out there to shake his hands or give him a hug of welcome. Hudson stood in the midst of shouting Chinese coolies (labourers who carry heavy loads), looking so forlorn and lost.

After a brief enquiry, Hudson was told that the British Consulate was just a stone's throw away. With the help of a guide, he set out eagerly to seek help to settle in China for his missionary work. Hudson was hopeful that his three letters of introduction (given in England) would go a long way in getting the assistance he needed at this critical time.

Upon arrival, Hudson was brought before an English official, who was not too surprised by the presence of an arriving Englishman. Apparently, he had dealt with many foreign missionaries to China before, and was not all that excited about the young missionary before him. In contrast, Hudson was enthusiastic and quick to inquire about the persons in his letters of introduction. To his first letter, the official replied, "Oh, he died of a fever a month ago and was buried." With a sinking heart, Hudson produced the second letter of introduction, only to be told, "He had already returned to America two years ago!" Disappointed and feeling rather desperate, Hudson showed his third letter of introduction.

"The Rev. Dr Medhurst of the London Missionary Society (LMS)," the official nodded slightly, "I believe he is still in Shanghai," he said without much expression.

His words lifted Hudson's spirits immediately. "At least, there's a ray of hope that I might find help after all!" Hudson felt much reassured in his heart.



The official instructed a Chinese clerk (who in turn engaged coolies) to bring Hudson to the compound of the LMS, a stone's throw from the Settlement (which was under European control in Shanghai from 1843 to 1943). With Hudson's bags hoisted to two ends of a bamboo pole, the coolies led the way, breaking into a jog trot. They passed through narrow streets lined with small, dark shops (which stood out with their eye-catching fanciful signs), restaurants, as well as portable food stalls (where vendors were busy calling out to customers to taste their savoury food served piping hot on the spot). The exchange of "strange" words among the people made him rather confused and uncertain. Perspiring but much relieved, Hudson finally reached the huge double gates of the LMS compound (also called the mission compound).

A Chinese doorkeeper approached them and bowed respectfully to Hudson, asking, "Master, wantee who?"

Replying, Hudson showed him the third letter of Introduction and said, "I would like to see Dr Medhurst."

"Doctor not at home. Doctor gone away," the doorkeeper apologised, bowing again.

"Where has he gone?" inquired Hudson.

The doorkeeper looked somewhat lost and puzzled. Hudson realised that the Chinese servant could not understand him as he had limited knowledge of the English language. Looking skyward, Hudson realised that it was getting dark and he might have no choice but to come again the next day. But what should he do in the meantime? He was about to walk off when he saw a young European man walking towards him.

"Good evening, I am Hudson Taylor," Hudson greeted the gentleman cheerfully.

With a broad smile, the young man shook his hand, saying, "My name is Joseph Edkins. I'm sorry, Dr Medhurst is not here, but his colleague Dr Lockhart is. I believe he'll be glad to help you. Please come in and make yourself at home while I go and fetch him."

While Edkins was away, another LMS staff came in. He was Alexander Wylie who did much to put Hudson at ease. Soon they were chatting animatedly. With the arrival of Dr Lockhart, the missionaries discussed the matter and came up with a temporary arrangement for Hudson.

As Dr Lockhart's family was not with him at that time, Hudson could stay with Dr Lockhart for a season. Not wanting to take advantage of his hospitality, Hudson planned to pay Dr Lockhart a modest sum for his board expenses. Shortly after, Dr Lockhart introduced him to the Burdons, a newly-married couple, who were warm and sympathetic towards him.

For the first four days in Shanghai, Hudson went along with Dr Medhurst, who conducted daily service in the hospital. It was the first time that Hudson heard the preaching of the Gospel in the Chinese tongue. In fact, it was Dr Medhurst who later engaged a Chinese teacher to teach him the Chinese language. Mr Wylie, who had some knowledge of the language, also offered his help when needed. Besides attending morning service at the hospital, Hudson also participated in the evening weekly prayer meetings. There, he met with other missionaries and enjoyed good fellowship with them.

Though Hudson had settled comfortably within the compound of the LMS, he hardly stepped out of the premises. There was danger everywhere as China was still in a state of civil war. Once, Hudson was with Mr Wylie outside the city when they heard the sound of cannonballs being fired very near to where they were. Quick as lightning, both ran for cover. However, two coolies, whom Mr Wylie had talked to earlier, lingered a little too long and were seriously injured by a stray cannonball. Their ankles were completely shattered, and both died soon after. What a close shave it had been for Mr Wylie and Hudson! Unbeknown to them, this was not to be their only narrow escape from death...

*(To be continued)*



